

Summary of Input and Recommendations of the State Rehabilitation Council; Response of the Designated State Unit; And Explanations for Rejection of Input or Recommendations

SBVI State Rehabilitation Council

The Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (Board), the state rehabilitation council for the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (Division), is in place to advise the Division in accordance with Title I, Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. The Board advises the Division in the development of state plans, policy related to the expenditure of federal funds and state funds and the coordination of planning and service delivery to individuals involved in vocational rehabilitation and independent living services. The Board serves as a representative for all individuals who are blind and visually impaired needing vocational rehabilitation and independent living services within the state. The Board's mission statement reflects these priorities: "*The mission of the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired is to promote independence, employment and full inclusion for all citizens who are blind or visually impaired.*" All Board agendas are developed by the Board's Executive Committee with the Division Director. Policies are provided to Board members in draft format to provide the opportunity for input prior to finalization of the policies. No recommendations by the Board of SBVI were rejected by the Division during the plan period.

Public Meetings - Public meetings are held on an annual basis to solicit input into the State Plan as well as to identify priorities for improving services to citizens who are blind or visually impaired. The Board of SBVI recommends topics to be prioritized for discussion and makes recommendations for locations for the meetings. Board members facilitate each of the meetings. Based on advice from the Board, consumer organizations host the meetings by circulating meeting announcements to constituents and providing refreshments and local transportation for the meetings. In addition, the Board recommended that a consultant be hired to conduct focus groups to solicit input from individuals who have received services from SBVI.

The Division agreed with the Board's recommendations related to public meetings. The Division held meetings at locations recommended by the Board with Board members serving as facilitators at the meetings. A consultant was hired to conduct focus groups and results reported to the

Board for consideration in the development of goals and strategies for the Division.

Governor's Awards for Employment of People with Disabilities - An annual "Governor's Luncheon" is held in recognition of individuals, employers and organizations for their contributions to the employment of persons with disabilities. This annual event is a joint effort of the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Department of Human Services. The Board of SBVI voted to sponsor this event and support attendance by members. In addition, the Board provided letters of support for 2 individuals who received awards.

The Division supported the Board's recommendation to support luncheon costs and attendance by Board members. The Division also supported the Board in submitting letters of support for individuals to be considered for the Governor's awards.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey - A Board committee recommended the format and questions for the consumer satisfaction survey. A follow-up survey is planned for FY 2007; results from this survey will be compared to the previous survey to gauge progress. Based on previous survey results, SBVI received high marks from consumers on the quality of services provided. SBVI scored lowest on questions pertaining to satisfaction with the level of earnings and benefits that successfully rehabilitated consumers received from their employers.

The Division has implemented board recommendations for format and content of consumer satisfaction surveys. Follow-up phone calls are conducted for those individuals who do not respond to the mail survey. This practice is based on the Board's recommendation to ensure access to the survey instrument for individuals with vision loss. Results are reported to the Board and included in the annual report.

Public Relations Activities by Board Members – The Board Public Relations committee prepared letters of support for individuals nominated for the Governor's Awards recognizing employment of people with disabilities.

SBVI supported the Public Relation committee's recommendations for letters of support.

Nominations for Board Vacancies – The Board of SBVI recommended individual's names to be submitted to the Governor's office for consideration of appointment for Board vacancies.

The Division submitted names recommend by the Board for consideration of appointment by the Governor. The Governor's office appointed those whose names were submitted.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month Activities - October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The Boards of SBVI and the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation along with the respective divisions in the Department of Human Services, planned activities in communities across the state to increase awareness of the capabilities of individuals with disabilities to work during October 2006. Activities included awards luncheons, presentations by successful individuals with disabilities, public service announcements, newspaper articles, and recognition of outstanding employers and outstanding employees with disabilities.

The Division of SBVI agrees with the Boards involvement with and contributions to National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities.

Board Representation at Consumer Organization Conventions - The Board of SBVI has made the commitment to financially support the attendance of consumers and a representative of the Board each year at state conventions of consumer organizations such as National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota and South Dakota Association of the Blind.

The Division supported the Board's recommendation for Board member representation at consumer organization conventions and Board sponsorship of stipends for individuals who are blind or visually impaired to attend the state conventions of consumer organizations. Board and public meetings are held in conjunction with consumer organization conventions, when possible.

Promotion of Employment of Individuals Who Are Blind – The Board recommended that administrative positions that become vacant in the Division of SBVI be opened and advertised to offer an opportunity to individuals who are blind to serve in upper level management positions.

The Division Director agreed to implement the Board's recommendation for promoting opportunities for employment to individuals who are blind or

visually impaired. The Board's recommendations were also shared with the Secretary of the Department of Human Services and the Bureau of Personnel Human Resource Manager for the Department of Human Services.

Visions Newsletter – The Board of SBVI recommended that the Division consider resurrecting the Visions newsletter for distribution to constituents. The Board also made recommendations for content of the newsletter.

Recommendations were implemented in the January 2007 edition of the newsletter including an article by the Board Chair. The biannual newsletter will be distributed in July of 2007 with input from the Board on content.

Transition Services for Youth who are Blind or Visually Impaired – The Board of SBVI recommended that the Division sponsor activities to address leadership, career planning and skills of blindness needs of transition age students who are blind or visually impaired. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work with students to plan their participation as part of Individual Plans for Employment.

Transition week was held July 24-28, 2006 at the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Aberdeen. Activities were based on suggestions by the Board of SBVI. The 2007 session will be held at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. Suggestions from the Board of SBVI will be shared with those planning the session.

The Division sponsors attendance of high school student who are blind or visually impaired at the annual Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). The YLF for Students with Disabilities is a unique career leadership training program for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities to serve as delegates from their communities. Students with disabilities cultivate leadership, citizenship, and social skills as a result of participating in this five-day event. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors work with students to plan their participation as part of Individual Plans for Employment.

Assistive Technology Services – Assistive technology services and training are keys to education and employment for citizens with vision loss. The Board of SBVI participates in making recommendations for assistive technology activities. Dakota Link, the states assistive technology project, provides one to one evaluation and training on a fee for service basis to those referred via an agreement with the division. An employee of Dakota

Link is the Community Rehabilitation Program representative on the Board of SBVI.

The Division supported Board recommendations related to assistive technology devices and services for consumers of SBVI.

Other Board Activities – The Board of SBVI recommended sponsorship of a variety of activities to promote employment and independence of citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

The Division supported a table sponsored by the Board on disability awareness day at the legislature to educate legislators on the capabilities and needs of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. The table included space for Board representation along with representation from the SD Association of the Blind and the Nation Federation of the Blind of SD.

Board Input on SBVI Policy – All policies are provided to Board members in draft format for their input prior to implementation.

One policy was developed during FY 2006 was the IPE Development program guide. This program guide was developed with guidance from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration and outlines a maximum of ninety days between eligibility and plan development. There are allowances in the policy for circumstances beyond the agency's control. The Board agreed with the program guide as written.